

# Erie County Taxpayer Newsletter



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## From County Executive Chris Collins



As we come to the end of another year, I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some of the new programs and initiatives we are undertaking in Erie County to help save taxpayer dollars and improve service.

Erie County's Lean Six Sigma program continues to move forward with 27 projects now complete. The projects improve efficiency and are saving millions of tax dollars.

The Erie County Department of Health has been working diligently since the spring to minimize the effects of the H1N1 virus in our County. A special Epidemiology and Surveillance unit is closely monitoring flu activity in hospital, urgent care facilities, schools and daycares throughout the County. The Department of Health's website has information about where to obtain H1N1 and seasonal flu vaccinations, at [www.erie.gov/health](http://www.erie.gov/health).

Our Senior Services Department helps people with or without insurance weigh their healthcare options throughout the year. The Insurance Resource Center in Senior Services offers personal counseling, website support and telephone help at no charge. With Medicare open enrollment this month, many people are confused about their options. Erie County Senior Services employees are available to answer questions at 858-7883.

Our Erie County Probation Department created a new initiative to conduct intensive home visits on cases with warrantless search provisions in October. In just two months, Probation Officers, working with other area police departments, have recovered 27 long guns, including two SKS assault rifles with bayonets, more than 40 bladed weapons and two cross-bows. Six arrests were made based on illegal drugs found in homes of probationers.

Employees in Erie County's Emergency Services Department coordinated a major training exercise with the National Guard. The Vigilant Guard drill simulated the aftermath of an earthquake. The response effort went extremely well and gave our County employees a good opportunity to work with their colleagues at local, State and Federal levels.

The County's Director of Veterans Services has helped local colleges and universities increase their veteran student enrollment numbers dramatically. At D'Youville College alone, they have enrolled 52 new veteran students this year, with an estimated economic impact of \$1.6 million.

Employees in the Department of Social Services were recognized by New York State for increasing child support collections in 2008 by 7.5 percent, bringing in \$74.9 million. It is one of the largest year-to-year increases in the entire State.

Our Public Works Department has moved forward on several major projects including completed work on Como Park Boulevard in Cheektowaga and the Freeman Road bridge dam in Orchard Park. Maple Road resurfacing in Amherst and repairs to the Parkview Bridge in Akron are underway. Construction on Wehrle Drive in Amherst will continue through next year.

Finally, our Department of Environment and Planning had great success this year introducing green energy programs to area businesses and the contaminated Spaulding Fibre site in City of Tonawanda is in the final clearing stages for redevelopment.

As 2009 comes to a close, I would like to wish you and your family a very happy holiday season.

## Contact the County Executive

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## Collins Makes Select Vetoes to Legislature's Budget Amendments

Erie County Executive Chris Collins made five vetoes to Budget amendments passed by the Erie County Legislature.

- Four of the five vetoes include taxpayer funding for new positions or the restoration of jobs deemed unnecessary and duplicative by the Administration. The eight vetoed new/restored positions are in the Health Department, Buildings & Grounds, Clerk's Office and Comptroller's Office.
  - ◊ Specifically, in the County Clerk's budget, the Legislature attempted to add three additional positions funded by three improper cuts. The three positions slated for deletion do not exist. **The end result of this action is an increase in the property tax levy unless this veto is allowed to stand.**
- The County Executive also vetoed \$100,000 in taxpayer funding earmarked for People United for Sustainable Housing, Inc. (PUSH) for a Distressed Real Property Reserve Fund. The County Executive understands the importance of dealing with distressed properties in the City of Buffalo, but feels that this issue – which impacts the entire County – deserves a more comprehensive strategy.

In addition, in its amendments passed earlier this month, the Legislature failed to follow the law in certain areas. As a result and in accordance with court rulings, the County Executive declared certain actions null and void.

- Two Budget Resolutions passed by the Legislature attempt to set up reserve funds (Olmsted Conservancy & PUSH). The Legislature is prohibited from setting up reserve funds, except under very specific circumstances detailed in New York State law. These resolutions do not meet that criteria and are deemed null and void by the Administration.

In his Veto Message, Collins again reminded the Legislature of the value of transferring non-mandated clinical services to local not-for-profit providers. The Administration has identified six local providers who are able and willing to accept the County's clinic clients into an expanded network of care. In addition, the County Executive believes that this transfer will provide a much needed injection of funding into the local not-for-profit community, and help the County streamline its government and reduce its unfunded liabilities.

"Instead of working with the Administration to accomplish these goals, the Legislature Majority chose a course of action that catered to special interests and protected union jobs," said Collins. "The Majority attempted to prevent the transfer, but sadly, in its haste to protect union jobs, it has drastically cut services by not accounting for the costs to support the clinic doctors and dentists."

"The Majority's actions have created a funding shortage that cannot be addressed or alleviated at this point in time within the budget process," continued Collins. "It is my hope that my Administration can work cooperatively with the incoming Legislature to resolve this situation after the first of the year."

Collins also expressed concerns over the Legislature increasing the vacancy turnover account by nearly \$3 million. The County Executive does not believe this funding will materialize. Collins was also critical of the Majority's continued shortchanging of the Road Fund, the pool of money used to help repair and upgrade the County's aging roadways and bridges.

### County Executive Chris Collins Signs Anti-Texting Law



Erie County Executive Chris Collins has signed into law the anti-texting measure passed by the Erie County Legislature in October.

The local law makes texting while driving a primary offense enforceable by the Erie County Sheriff's Department. Motorists can be fined \$150 for each violation. The law may also be enforced by other local law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction within Erie County. Current New York State law makes texting while driving a secondary offense.



### Communicating with Supervisors

Last month, County Executive Collins held a meeting with supervisors and mayors from around Erie County at the Elma Meadows Golf Course. The County Executive holds supervisors' meetings on a quarterly basis to keep an open dialogue about regional challenges and solutions.

## **Erie County Probation Officers Recover Drugs/Weapons in Raids**

### *Town of Tonawanda Police, Depew Police and Border Patrol Assist in Arrests*

Erie County Probation Officers performed five warrantless searches of probationers' homes in Depew late last month.



Working with Depew Police, they seized 15 weapons, prescription medications and hypodermic needles. One arrest was made as a result of the searches, and one is pending.

Last week, in another round of warrantless searches, Probation Officers seized numerous weapons, drugs and money at the home of a convicted felon. A loaded, 12-gauge shot gun was found in the living room of the home.

In all, five homes were searched and three arrests were made during the raid by the warrant squad with assistance from Town of Tonawanda Police and Border Patrol officers.

Two machetes and a cross-bow were among the weapons recovered in these raids. The warrantless searches are the result of a new initiative started by Probation Director Rachelle Cybulski and Central Police Services Commissioner Pete Vito. They are proving to be extremely beneficial to the community and officer safety.

### **New Mentoring Programs for Troubled Youth**

Two exciting programs are being added to serve young people at the Erie County Youth Detention Facility. The Boys and Girls Clubs of Buffalo, in collaboration with the Erie County Youth Detention Center, was recently awarded a federal "Second Chance Mentoring Grant" in the amount of \$567,000. The grant will fund a program that reduces recidivism among juvenile offenders and gives them positive development tools to overcome their past mistakes.

The Boys & Girls Club of Buffalo has been active in the Erie County Youth Detention Center since 2002. This grant will allow for expansion of staff and programming in the center through October of 2012. It will also connect youth to their local clubhouse and provide a long-term mentor upon their release.

Youth in the Detention Center are generally aged 13 to 16 years old, and are at risk of academic failure, substance abuse, gang activity, and repeated juvenile delinquency. Apart from seeking to reduce recidivism and provide a successful transition to home communities, the program aims to help these youth build a sense of leadership, responsibility, and self confidence. In order to achieve these goals, the Boys and Girls Club staff will recruit and train mentors from D'Youville College. Mentors will work with the young people for a minimum of 24 months. Education, career development, health, life skills, character and leadership development programs will be offered to prepare the youth for life after the detention facility. The program will be measured through attendance records, tests, report cards, mentor and parent surveys.

In addition, Literacy Volunteers of Buffalo and Erie County will be providing programming to young people in the Erie County Youth Detention Center, starting in January. Literacy Volunteers has approximately 400 active tutors locally, and provided more than 10,000 hours of tutoring and other volunteer work this past year. This will be their first time providing services at the Erie County Youth Detention Center.

### **Changes to County Fleet Save Money**

The Department of Public Works (DPW), under Commissioner Jerry Sentz, has made numerous changes in the County fleet policies to save taxpayer dollars. DPW took over Fleet services this year.

A monthly report is now prepared showing fuel usage by department. Usage is tracked based on pre-set goals, and overages are discussed for correction. Vehicle usage is also now being tracked to identify and eliminate under-used vehicles. As under-used vehicles are identified, discussions are held with the department heads and then the vehicles may be assigned to other departments, or placed up for auction.

The County also now uses rental cars for out of town travel, rather than reimbursing employees for using their own vehicles or using County pool cars. This new program has already saved \$9,000 in just four months.

The Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority (Control Board) recently awarded the DPW an \$850,000 grant to purchase new vehicles. Commissioner Sentz says the new vehicles will save money by reducing fuel usage and maintenance costs. Older vehicles will be auctioned, bringing in additional funding.



## Education Project Focuses on Teen Drivers and Crash Dangers

In the past five years, 37 high school aged drivers in Erie County have been killed in traffic crashes, including six so far this year. Many more have been seriously injured. Crash data demonstrates that the first 18 months of every driver's career are the most dangerous. The combination of inexperience, distraction, and youthful impulse can be a deadly mix for novice drivers.

Erie County's Central Police Services Commissioner Peter M. Vito recently convened a group of experienced Traffic Safety Instructors who deliver driver safety courses to Erie County High School students. With a grant obtained from the New York State Governor's Traffic Safety Committee, and coordinated by the Erie County STOP-DWI Office, the instructors visit area classrooms and focus student attention on the main causes of vehicle crashes; speeding, distracted driving, seatbelt usage and crash dynamics.

"Alcohol is always a concern among teen drivers," Vito said, "but our crash data indicates that other behaviors cause the majority of crashes. The instructors focus on these causes and provide practical skills that students can use on their drive home that day."

Presentations include crash avoidance techniques and link them to images and case studies of locally investigated crashes. The photos and background information help focus the attention of students on the dangers of driving.

The presentations are designed for a single classroom and fit into one class period. Any teacher and school administrator may request a presentation at their convenience by visiting [www.erie.gov/stopdwi](http://www.erie.gov/stopdwi). Just click on the "Request a Traffic Safety Instructor" box and complete a short request form. The form is sent to an instructor who then contacts the school to make arrangements. There is no fee for this service.

Other questions concerning the project may be directed to John Sullivan, Director, Erie County STOP-DWI Office, 716-858-6727.

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## Erie County Recognizes National Adoption Day

*More foster parents urgently needed in our area*



*County Executive Chris Collins and Social Services Commissioner Carol Dankert thank case workers as they recognize National Adoption Day.*

Erie County Executive Chris Collins joined members of the County Department of Social Services to recognize the 10<sup>th</sup> annual National Adoption Day. The department set up displays in the lobby of the Rath Building today to highlight adoption and foster care needs in Erie County. Case workers oversee adoption cases in the County and have reduced the number of children awaiting adoption by 50 percent over the last three years.

National Adoption Day is a collective effort to raise awareness of the 129,000 children in U.S. foster care waiting to find permanent, loving homes. Since its inception nine years ago, more than 25,000 children have been adopted from foster care on National Adoption Day. In Erie County, more than 300 children are legally eligible for adoption. Many of them are between the ages of 10 and 16. So far this year, 103 children have been adopted in the County, with 11 in the month of November alone. Most of these adoptions are done by foster parents or relatives.

County Executive Collins said, "We are still in urgent need of more foster and adoptive parents in Erie County and I hope many families will consider opening their homes to children in need this holiday season and throughout the year."

This year, National Adoption Day was officially observed on Saturday, November 21<sup>st</sup>. Foster and adoptive parents are compensated for costs and are given clothing allowances, room and board payments as well as medical care for children in foster care. The best foster and adoptive parents have the ability to love and care for children. They have the capability to manage stressful and emotional situations, as well as provide a safe environment for children to live in. For more information about how to become a foster parent, please call 858-7274 or register for the next public information meeting by calling 716-858-6868.

## Community Alternative Systems Agency (CASA)

The Community Alternative Systems Agency (CASA) has been helping Erie County residents since 1983. CASA's primary function is to determine the need and appropriate level of Medicaid long term care services as well as to develop suitable care plans for community based elderly and disabled individuals in the County. CASA is committed to assisting these individuals to reside in the safest, least restrictive, most cost effective environment possible. Since 2007, CASA has been a joint effort between the Erie County Department of Social Services and Jewish Family Services.

CASA oversees many Medicaid funded programs that are mandated by the New York State Department of Health and social services law. Agency cases are comprised of people of all ages, from infants to clients who are older than 100. These clients live all over Erie County with 58% in the city of Buffalo and 42% throughout the suburbs.

Since 1995, CASA has assumed the role of "gatekeeper" for all community based long term care. The following 2007 statistics from the State Health Department show that Erie County CASA has one of the lowest annual costs per client's care plan in New York State:

AREA	AVERAGE ANNUAL AUTHORIZED HOURS PER CLIENT	AVERAGE ANNUAL COST PER CLIENT AT \$20/HOUR
Statewide (incl. NYC)	1666	\$33,320.00
New York City	1977	\$39,540.00
Rest of State (excluding NYC)	881	\$17,620.00
Erie County	506	\$10,120.00

Clients have "one-stop shopping" where CASA Medicaid examiners determine a client's eligibility for Medicaid, caseworkers obtain medical orders for needed services and also go to the client's residence to assess for appropriate services. Caseworkers also make referrals for other services such as Meals on Wheels through Senior Services, medical transportation, medical day programs, or adult protection as necessary.

If you are aware of persons who may be in need of home care services, please call 858-2323 to make a referral. To be eligible for CASA services clients must be enrolled for Medicaid.



*The new Green Belts pose with County Executive Chris Collins, Deputy County Executive Al Hammonds, Lean Six Sigma Director Bill Carey and Tim Leyh of U.B.*

## Erie County Introduces More Lean Six Sigma Green Belts

Erie County Executive Chris Collins presented nine County employees with their official Six Sigma Green Belt certifications last month at a special ceremony. This class represents the third group of County employees to complete the 72 hours of training necessary to achieve Green Belt certification.

Each employee has completed a Lean Six Sigma project to drive efficiency in County government and save taxpayer dollars.



## Erie County Employees Help United Way in a Big Way

A number of Erie County employees from various departments worked on the United Way campaign this year. These workers held a basket raffle, and organized paycheck contribution efforts, to help the United Way meet its fundraising goal.

Thus far, Erie County workers have contributed about 80% of the goal of \$191,506, and pledges continue to come in.

If you are interested in contributing to the United Way, please contact the Erie County United Way co-chairs, Sawrie Becker at 716-858-8307 or Frank Decarlo at 716-858-4921.



## Resource Center in Senior Services Helps People with or without Insurance

*Personal Counseling Sessions, Web Site Support, and Telephone Help Available at No Charge*

Many people are confused about their options regarding Medicare and other health insurance, but Erie County's Department of Senior Services offers free and objective assistance.

"Couples with resources as high as \$25,010 may qualify for some additional help. We know some people are not comfortable researching on-line and many options are confusing. We can help," said Bill Daniels, the Outreach Coordinator with the Senior Services' Insurance Resource Center. "The Medicare Prescription Drug Program changes every year, and seniors should examine all their options, especially those who may qualify for extra help with drug costs. Anyone who is forced to choose between buying the medicine they need or paying their bills should call us. We will do our utmost to help," he added.

Senior Services also helps individuals without Medicare. Since experts at Senior Services do not sell insurance plans, they are able to offer completely unbiased information about all available choices, including Healthy New York, EPIC and other local plans. Often there are options to help with medical expenses that many people don't know about.

Erie County Senior Services hosts group information sessions at convenient locations, provides technical support for people seeking information, offers one-on-one sessions to help seniors enroll and distributes materials comparing local plans. Anyone with questions about Medicare Part D, the low-income subsidy, or other health insurances may call 858-7883 during business hours, or visit our website for resources and a schedule of outreach sessions at [www.erie.gov/insuranceresourcecenter](http://www.erie.gov/insuranceresourcecenter).

## Planning Ahead for Women's History Month

As the new Executive Director for Erie County's Commission on the Status of Women, Sawrie Becker is already making plans to celebrate Women's History Month in March. Becker is working with the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library to create a National Women's History Month calendar both electronically and in print, listing activities and events across the region that showcase the influence and achievements of local women through the years.

If you're planning an event between February 21 and April 4, 2010, that relates to women and their achievements that you'd like to share for the calendar, please call 716-858-8307.

## 2010 County Golf Passes Now Available

Just in time for the holidays, the Erie County Parks Department is now selling gift certificates for golf for the 2010 season. Gift certificate applications and pricing details are available at

[www.erie.gov/parks/pdf/EC\\_Gift\\_Cert.pdf](http://www.erie.gov/parks/pdf/EC_Gift_Cert.pdf).

For more information, call 716-858-8355.

On a separate note, the Parks Department expects to open the toboggan chutes at Chestnut Ridge Park on Friday, December 18th.



## Welcoming Buffalo Ambassadors

County Executive Chris Collins thanked a group of volunteers who signed up to become Buffalo Ambassadors earlier this month. The volunteers will reach out to organizations they're associated with around the County, and try to convince them to bring conventions and sporting events to Buffalo. If you'd like to become a Buffalo Ambassador, visit [www.visitbuffaloniagara.com/Ambassador](http://www.visitbuffaloniagara.com/Ambassador).



## Promoting Math and Science

Deputy County Executive Al Hammonds spoke to a group of children in Buffalo about the importance of learning Math and Science earlier this month.

## Erie County's Online Surplus Auctions Already a Success

The first-ever online auction of County vehicles located at the Chestnut Ridge storage yard ended Monday, November 16<sup>th</sup>, and featured 16 vehicles taken out of service from various agencies throughout the County. The second online auction of Erie County vehicles and equipment ran from November 23<sup>rd</sup> until December 7<sup>th</sup>. That auction included police cruisers from the Sheriff's Office, loaders, rollers and heavy dump trucks, as well as smaller pieces of Highway Department surplus and other items. There were over 75 lots in the auction.

The online auctions benefit the County's bottom line (and the taxpayers) by saving costs associated in the past with transporting non-running vehicles and heavy equipment. Instead, the items will be sold from whatever County facilities they are located at when taken out of service. The savings include a significant reduction in fuel, labor and storage costs.

Other upcoming online auctions of County surplus include passenger vehicles and small equipment from the Military Road facility, Sheriff's vehicles and various auto parts from the Sheriff's Garage in Alden, plus a Sheriff's boat and docks from Isleview Park in Tonawanda.

The online auctions are held at [www.auctionsinternational.com](http://www.auctionsinternational.com). Auction cycles run for 14 days. The goal of hosting these surplus auctions online is to expand the bidding audience by providing convenience, with bidding available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Contact the auction company directly at 800-536-1401 with questions about the auctions.



*Erie County Executive Chris Collins, UB President John Simpson and Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown listen as the Buffalo Niagara Partnership CEO Dr. Andrew Rudnick announces the Partnership's 2010 Regional Agenda. The Agenda is a collaborative effort of the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls, the counties of Erie and Niagara and the Buffalo Niagara Partnership.*

## Senior Services Works to Increase Health Screenings Among Older Adults

The American Cancer Society (ACS) has a FREE service available to anyone who wants to register—to receive reminder notices when it's time to get a particular health or cancer screening. The Erie County Department of Senior Services is working with the NYS Office for the Aging and the American Cancer Society to assist older adults with registering at the ACS website [www.cancer.org/remindme](http://www.cancer.org/remindme).

Senior Services will be helping people register in senior centers, congregate meal sites, senior housing and other locations by walking them through the process via laptop computers. Anyone with a valid e-mail address (or that of a willing friend or family member) can enroll for the reminders.

Contact the Erie County Department of Senior Services at 858-8526 or visit [www.erie.gov/depts/seniorservices](http://www.erie.gov/depts/seniorservices) for more information on this project. For many people, Medicare pays for diabetes screening, counseling for quitting tobacco use, and most cancer screenings and other preventive health services.

### Coming next issue:

- **Winterfest returns to Chestnut Ridge**
- **New online property tax payment system will be available**

New Civil Service announcements with the last filing dates up to **January 6, 2010** are now available on the County's website.

Please see: [www.erie.gov/employment](http://www.erie.gov/employment)

or call the Erie Co. Civil Service Exam Line at **716-858-8729**.

